# THE EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

BY
EUNICE CARMICHAEL ROBERTS
A.B., University of Illinois, 1923
A.M., University of Illinois, 1924

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
FRENCH IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

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## THE EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

It must be admitted at the outset that Anatole France was not an educational theorist in any professional sense of the word. As an educated, thinking man he was concerned with the general aspects of the question. He even discusses at times very specific problems of curriculum and technique. But he does not consciously set out to suggest or establish a system or theory of education.

One may well ask, then, whether it is of value to attempt to determine what he thought about it. But may it not be said of the opinions of Anatole France on any subject, that he did not set out to establish a philosophy or a theory? By precedent, then, we may justify a study of his educational ideals, for his opinions on most other subjects have been studied and analyzed extensively and often to good purpose.

We have, however, a greater justification than precedent. Anatole France was one of the important men of his age. His very breadth of interest and length of period of activity add value to his opinions. His association with the educated people of his day and, in the latter part of his life, his specific interest in some of the newly founded schools, his exceedingly wide range of study and reading—all combine to give him an unusual foundation for the formulation of ideas. For these very reasons his opinions may be of greater value and interest than those of some professional educators who have confined themselves to their own narrow fields.

There is great variety in the writings of Anatole France. What will be our sources for finding his educational ideals? For our present purpose we may divide his work roughly into four parts: those works in which he is speaking definitely in his own name, such as literary prefaces, speeches, much of his journalistic work; the autobiographical books; those in which a character of the book may be taken to be the author's mouthpiece; and those in which we may infer opinion from the action or incident of the story. We shall also make use of books of recorded conversations with him, of which there have been several.

The principal aim of education in the opinion of Anatole France is to teach the student to think. Thought is the sovereign force on earth, the very essence of human dignity. Without its power no human progress

is possible; nor is there any pleasure in life. Without it man would inevitably slip into the slough of mediocrity, than which no fate would be more abominable. It seems scarcely necessary to point out that, when France speaks of teaching the student to think, he means teaching him to think logically, accurately, and clearly.

The function of thought is to add to the richness of life, the life of the race and the life of the individual. France would have us all enjoy life with zest—fine works of art, the beauties of nature, the masterpieces of literature, beautiful music, human contacts, love. Experience and appreciate all of these and you will acquire the "art de vivre" which is the ultimate goal of all existence and the end toward which education must strive to prepare youth. It is for this purpose that we must teach the student to think, for it is through the power of thought that full appreciation comes.

Education must be general. We are trying to teach our student the art of living. The best foundation for this is a broad cultural and esthetic background. This means that we must strive for moderation and harmony. Excess in any direction would be fatal and would make living not an art but a mere existence. One excess to be most zealously avoided is intolerance. There can be no real society of educated men unless it is founded upon tolerance. There must be freedom of thought and freedom of expression. Freedom of thought implies a spirit of doubt and inquiry, which is the only way of arriving at scientific truth and progress. Freedom of expression is essential in any healthy society.

In order to keep education general we must teach broad basic ideas rather than bodies of fact and nomenclature, which have no real significance except to the student who has already acquired the underlying general ideas upon which they are founded. Facts are important, yes; but not so important as ideas. Teach the student fundamental ideas, give him the ability to use them, and he will know how to acquire the facts.

Education must be varied. The sort of learning which will fill the needs of one person might be utterly useless for another. It is stupid to suppose that a merchant needs to know the same things as a doctor. The broad cultural background is desirable for all those who are able to acquire it. After that we must diversify education to fit the needs of the individual.

We must further diversify it by combining the useful with the mere-

ly pleasant. The beautiful has a value *per se* in adding to the richness of life. When it is properly combined with the useful, the result is a unified whole which is both useful and beautiful.

It is essential that the interest of the student be aroused. There can be no real education without interest. If the student takes pleasure in what he is doing, then he will be able to learn; if he is not interested, no amount of time spent in drilling will be of much value. If we can create an interest on the part of the student the result for him will be a love of learning without which no one ever quite masters the art of living. The love of learning is composed, for Anatole France, of two elements: a voluptuous love somewhat akin to love for women—learning for the pure joy that is to be derived from it; and an intellectual interest which manifests itself in a spirit of curiosity and inquiry, prerequisites to any intellectual achievement.

The love of learning, in a student of real intelligence, will lead to a true erudition, which France admires. He does not admire the ordinary conception of a savant. He considers him a man out of touch with his fellow and incapable of human emotions, a mere receptacle for information of no real interest. True erudition consists of broad learning and an intelligent application of it to worth while things.

True intelligence is very rare. It is an admirable and charming quality in the few, but it would be really tragic if it were too widespread. It is actually contrary to nature, having nothing to do with our basic impulses of love and hunger.

The older generation has an obligation to the younger generation to provide it an education. Each generation through the various stages of man's development has felt this obligation. Without it the race would not have progressed as it has.

France has a great deal to say about the debt which present generations owe to former generations. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to past cultures. Especially does the Frenchman have a heritage from the past, for French culture, which is the noblest thing in the world, is a direct inheritance from Latin culture. Without the Latin, the French would never exist in its present form. Greek culture forms an important part of our heritage, important in itself and also because from it so much of the Latin was drawn. Popular legend and folk-lore add another element to those which combine to make our inheritance. Students owe to this heritage their finest efforts to understand, preserve, and continue it.

In his earlier writings France shows no concern with general social theories on education. By the turn of the century he had become interested in social conditions. He felt that there should be no difference in educational opportunities open to the children of poor families and those of the rich. They should attend the same elementary schools. Those who showed ability, rich or poor, would be sent at state expense to secondary schools. The best of these would then be sent to higher schools of arts and science. Thus would democracy be best administered.

The love which Anatole France felt for the ancients becomes more strikingly apparent when he discusses his ideas on curriculum. He considered that the study of the classics, especially of Latin, is excellent to teach the student to think clearly and logically, and to express his thoughts. A study of the humanities forms men and teaches them to think. France could pay no higher tribute than that. No modern language is so clear and ordered as Latin and therefore no modern language is of such educational value.

In addition to their value as disciplinary subjects, the classics contribute an element of real pleasure to the school curriculum. France enjoyed them immensely as a youth and felt that nothing would have provided an adequate substitute. Aside from the training involved in the study of the Latin language, and any pleasure derived from it, Latin literature is so full of valuable thoughts and ideas that it should be included in the school curriculum for that reason if for no other.

There is no question that Anatole France was fonder of the Greek genius than of the Latin. He loved Greek culture with a voluptuous love. He would like to see it included in the school curriculum. But he realized that there was little likelihood of its ever being restored to its former place of importance in the schools. He was resigned to letting the student absorb as much as possible of Greek culture through Latin literature. He admitted further that Greek is not nearly so well adapted as Latin for teaching in the schools and that it is not so valuable purely as a training course.

He has little to say about the study of modern foreign languages except to point out that they are not so well ordered and concise as Latin and are therefore not so valuable as training courses. As to the foreign literatures, he speaks in high admiration of translations of some of the English and German authors, especially of Shakespeare and Goethe. But he feels that they are so involved in both language and ideas that they

would be extremely difficult for the young student to grasp. They will never be classics for the Frenchman in the same way that the ancients and the masterpieces of French literature are, although it is obvious that he expects his educated man to be acquainted with some of them.

From early childhood France had a passionate love for the French language. He can give an author no higher praise than to say that his language is "du vrai francais." There seems to be almost an element of mysticism in his love for his mother tongue. He can scarcely conceive that anyone might not love it as he does. We may find it a little surprising, then, that he is so oppossed to the study of the French language in the schools. It seems to him ridiculous for a student to study French when he has been speaking it all his life. It is his mother tongue; why would he need to study it?

He is especially opposed to the teaching of grammar. The language of the grammarian is always awkward and unnatural. A student who has heard and read French all his life will be able to express himself without studying grammar. He feels that a good literary style requires accurate syntax. But he thinks that good writers write by a sort of sixth sense. Good French will be attained by feeling rather than by rule. Far more valuable to the student than a study of grammar will be a study of fine examples of the language in the masterpieces of literature. He expects the student to know thoroughly the best of French literature.

France expected a love of works of art and of fine music to be a part of every one's life. Without this something would be missing from the "art de vivre" which would make it incomplete. From references which he makes to his own childhood it is clear that he considered that the orportunity of enjoying masterpieces of art is valuable training for the young person. As for music, he considered it one of the finest, if not the finest of the arts, although he himself, with his "oreilles de Caliban," was incapable of appreciating it. However, important as he considered the plastic arts and music, he makes no specific suggestions for their inclusion in the school curriculum.

Of the social sciences he attaches the greatest importance to history. In order to understand civilization and our own place in the scheme of things, we must understand human progress through the ages. By the study of history he does not mean learning a series of dates; he means a real study of the development of the race. He cautions us not to present this to the student until he is mature enough to comprehend it.

He views history as an art rather than a science. The historian must continually exercise his judgment in attempting to determine true cause and effect relationships. It is impossible always to know what events are historically important. The element of judgment and interpretation involved are what make it an art.

The place of geography in education is somewhat the same as the place of history, although France does not attach so much weight to it. An understanding of geography leads us to an understanding of our place in the universe. It is good for us to realize our unimportance in the whole scheme of things. Anatole France admired the exact sciences. Science is a sovereign power. She may be a little exasperating at times. She is not to be hurried. But she is exact and infallible. Man may sometimes misinterpret scientific results but that is not her fault, and patience will eventually clear up all errors. France realized that we are living in an age in which science is especially important. He thinks instruction in the sciences is essential in the school curriculum. He warns us to be sure that we have true science and not just a body of useless names of which the student is able to make no application. It is valuable to know the results science has obtained. It is of far greater value to learn the scientific method. Having learned that, the student will be able to apply it to many of his problems.

Among the sciences, mathematics is the one he admires most. We consider some of the other sciences exact, but mathematics is the only entirely exact body of knowledge we have. It is the foundation for all else. Especially is this true of geometry, whose laws underlie everything in the universe.

We must be cautious not to introduce the sciences to the student before he is old enough to understand them. The vicious educational practise of bifurcation overlooked this danger. Children of fourteen or fifteen were required to decide whether they wished to specialize in letters or in the sciences. Their courses were then planned on the basis of this decision. France felt that this was entirely too early an age at which to ask the child to specialize. He felt that many of the evils of the educational system were a result of the introduction of this practise.

Exceedingly important is the relationship between the student and his teacher. The teacher must be able to control his class and command their respect. Even more important than respect is the desirability of a feeling of mutual affection between teacher and pupil. France has given

us some beautiful examples in his novels of the ideal relationship between student and teacher. And he cites the classic example from Rabelais of Pantagruel and his teacher Ponocrates.

The instructor must show a comprehension of the point of view of the child, realizing that his understanding is growing and has not yet reached adult capacity. Instruction must be given in terms which the child can understand. Again France cites Rabelais. He contrasts the ideal methods employed by Ponocrates with the very unsatisfactory methods used by Maître Jobelin.

In the matter of disipline and punishment the best technique is gentleness. France indicates a definite disapproval of harsh disciplinary measures, although he does not speak categorically against them. He recognizes, however, that an entire disregard of discipline would be fatal.

France does not believe in examinations, either written or oral. He especially dislikes questions involving appreciation of literature. As to factual questions, he feels that you cannot expect a youngster to know anything of real significance. All he can do is to repeat what has been told him, perhaps without even understanding it.

Again France goes to Rabelais for an important lesson in technique. The child must not be required simply to learn by rote in the way in which Maître Jobelin taught. The ideal way is to bring the pupil into direct contact with things, as did Ponocrates. Let him learn by observing. Talk with him about things. Answer his questions. In this way the child will learn how to learn.

The student must be given some time for recreation. His activities must not be prescribed all the time. It is essential that he be given a certain amount of freedom of thought and action without which he is almost enslaved within the rules of his school.

Much educational value is to be derived from having the child study the habits of animals. By understanding them he will better understand himself. Not only is it valuable for him to study their habits; it is well for him to have some animals about him for whose care he is responsible.

France did not consider the motion picture a very important technical aid in education. This is interesting in view of the developments in the industry since the time of his death. He felt that there could be a "cinéma documentaire" which could be of very great aid; but he saw only a pernicious influence in the motion picture as it was then. He felt

that it marked the end of a phase of European culture. It may well be, however, that he would have found things to admire in the modern motion picture. He considered the stage a very powerful tool for disseminating ideas. In some respects the modern cinema has the advantages which France attributed to the stage. He mentions also the aid which the motion picture could offer to journalism. It has certainly begun to fulfill its possibilities in that respect.

A very important part is played in the development of the child and youth by the environment in which he grows up. The most important single influence upon him is that of his mother, which begins even before he is born. It is difficult for anyone to attain success if he has not started life with the affectionate interest of his mother. She is his first teacher. She sets the general tone of the home. The child learns as much at home as at school, perhaps even more. Intimate family meals in a tranquil atmosphere, accompanied by intelligent conversation, are very valuable educationally.

Anyone with whom the child comes in contact is bound to have an influence upon him—his father, the servants, friends who come into the home. After he is old enough to start to school no influence is so important nor so instructive as the streets themselves. By observing what goes on he can learn more about the social processes than he can ever learn in school in a course in sociology. He can acquire a feeling for life out on the streets which he could never acquire in the classroom or laboratory, and without which he will not be an entirely balanced individual. France felt that in his own case he actually derived more profit from contacts outside the school than from those within. These contacts were for him principally along the quais, especially in the book shops. He considered himself very fortunate in his surroundings. It seemed to him impossible that anyone could grow up in such an environment and not derive lasting benefits from it. He felt that the "bouquinistes" of the quais actually played a greater part in his intellectual education than did his teachers at the university. It was in their shops he began to acquire a sane and balanced philosophy of life. He was very grateful to his parents for allowing him to be a day pupil instead of a boarding pupil because that made it possible for him to be out on the streets every day and to come under the influence of the home every evening.

France has little to say about character education as a planned phase of formal school teaching. He makes comments now and then about

general aspects of character development without specific reference to the educational process. One of the more important problems of his own childhood in this respect arose from the fact that he was an only child. His family realized that he was not getting the proper training in how to conduct himself in the ordinary social contacts of life. His imagination was becoming over-developed, and he was beginning to show a tendency toward mischievous escapades which were annoying to his family. It was decided to put him in school in the belief that association with other children would overcome some of these faults in his character.

His mother was very much concerned lest he come in contact with bad companions. His father felt, on the other hand, that that was a necessary part of a child's education, that he must learn to distinguish between the desirable and the undesirable. His mother felt that he must be kept away from children who were not "bien élevés." He must realize that it was not their fault, but their misfortune. But he must avoid them. France was grateful to his mother for pointing out that it was a misfortune rather than a fault to be "mal élevé." He always remembered this lesson and understood the innocence of the unfortunates of society. I believe, however, that he inclined toward his father's opinion that the child must come in contact with all sorts of people. He always opposed restrictions of individual liberties. And he has certainly indicated that he considered it valuable for the child to mingle with working people and trades-people in the streets.

France would have the child trained in charitable works, partly, at least, because one derives pleasure from practising charity. His mother encouraged his own early awkward attempts in this direction.

As for training in moral conduct, he obviously feels that this is to be accomplished principally by example and by gentle admonition. His mother was always very gentle and included frequent moral precepts in her conversations with him.

He was convinced that there is no correlation between education and morality. In fact, learning may be actually inimical to morality by destroying prejudices, upon which many of our moral concepts are founded. It is difficult to prove moral truth and the realization of this fact may tend to undermine moral conduct.

He felt that suffering and sorrow exert a salutary effect upon character development. He did not love suffering, but it is a part of life, and to live life to the full it is necessary to have experienced it. Most of our

creative achievements are possible only after suffering. Without it life cannot fail to be mediocre and sterile, than which France can conceive of no worse fate. It is the duty of the educators of the young to indoctrinate them in such a way that they can accept sorrow and turn it into something beautiful.

He believes children should be given duties to perform. They enjoy the sense of responsibility which work gives them. Children do not consider work sad. They realize that it is serious, but they enjoy the feeling of achievement after having accomplished a task.

In discussing the education of women and girls France points out that there are distinct differences between women and men. In general, woman has not so reflective a nature, but is more sensitive than man. However, he has a high regard for her intelligence. He believes that she has as much right to an education as man, although for most women it will be of a somewhat different type from man's education.

In the first place, it will be more general. Teach broad basic ideas rather than large bodies of fact or long lists of names which have no real meaning to the student. The effort should be to excite curiosity and interest. There will be many girls with a type of intelligence which will not be interested in much study. Respect their desires and do not force learning on them. On the other hand, there are a few women who have a real flair for scientific research or creative literary effort. He thinks it unreasonable to criticize them for this.

The ideal education for the average girl would make her somewhere between the real "savante" and the simple girl who is content with little or no education. For the most part, girls should not be taught technical scientific data. They should be adequately trained in the useful pursuits they will have to follow as women. But they should be given opportunities to enjoy the beauties of art and nature, for the ultimate goal for them, as for man, is to acquire the "art de vivre," the real end of all education.

France was very much interested in the formation, at about the beginning of the century, of many so-called "popular universities." These were schools formed for adults of the working class, who felt a need for educational opportunities, and who were themselves largely instrumental in the foundation of the schools. Their chief purpose was to ameliorate conditions for the working people, both in a material way, and by giving them opportunities for spiritual and intellectual development. France

encouraged such schools at every opportunity. He admired the working man's desire for an education, even under the handicap of having so little time for study, and that only after the fatigue of a day spent at hard work.

One may question whether adults, tired from a hard day's work, are capable of real study. France feels that they are. He thinks that they will find difficulties. But they will have one advantage over students in the ordinary schools. They are studying because they have a real desire for learning; they want to acquire knowledge and methods which will enable them to think with exactitude and which will enrich their inner lives. They are not studying merely to pass required examinations, as are the youths in the ordinary schools.

As to choice of curriculum, his advice is of the same sort that he has always given in remarks upon education in general. Attempt to combine the useful with the beautiful. We may put somewhat more emphasis on the useful in adult education, on account of the difference in circumstances. The working man's time is limited. He wants to see immediate useful applications of his learning. This is legitimate. But we must not overlook entirely the esthetic side, without which one does not feel the "joie de vivre" which France would have us all experience.

Our conclusion must be that Anatole France had a high ideal for education. Sceptic though he is accused of being, he nevertheless had some definite beliefs which he reiterated throughout his writing career. It may indeed be affirmed that he had two different ideals which are in no way contradictory.

He had an absolute ideal which he knew could be attained by only the few, by what we may refer to as an intellectual élite. It would not need to be concerned with the practical aspects of life. It would master the classics of Latin and Greek literature for the pure pleasure to be derived from them. He had a second, relative ideal for those who could not belong to the intellectual aristocracy. For them he desired as much of a cultural background as possible, but he wanted their education to be suited to their individual needs so that it would prepare them for life as they would have to live it.

There is an essential harmony between these two ideals, for both have as their motivating force the desire that every individual be prepared to enjoy life to the fullest of his capacity, that everyone acquire the art of living so that he may make of his life a thing of esthetic

beauty. It is this aim for all education which synthesizes the two ideals of Anatole France. He would have education adapt itself to individual differences, but with the same ideal for all—the maximum preparation for the art of living. In other words, his is a democratic ideal, in that it demands equality of opportunity for all classes of society and for all types of people.

This involves a recognition of the worth of the individual and of his rights as a member of society. In essence, it indicates an optimistic belief in the essential dignity and perfectibility of man. France has been accused of being a cynic. His ideals for education are anything but those of a cynic.

There is little original thinking back of these ideals. His admiration for the ancients is distinctly in the French classical tradition and goes back in its ultimate origin to the Rennaissance revival of interest in the humanities. His attitude toward the study of the classics may be described as a combination of the attitudes of the French classical scholar and the Renaissance humanist. The classicist was interested in form, order, language, harmony. The student of the Renaissance was interested in form, but he was especially interested in content. He reveled in a whole new world of thought opened up to him. Of course, there was much dry pedantry; but there was also a type of Renaissance scholar who was the contrary of the university pedant. Influenced by movements in Italy, he was in love with the humanities. He studied them for the pure joy he derived from them and the fascination of any new discoveries he might make in the world of ideas.

From the seventeenth century France borrowed what was perhaps its most important belief educationally—a belief in the sovereign power of thought and of ideas. He believed that one of the fundamental purposes of education is to teach the student to think. Facts are important as tools but are worth nothing unless one has the ability to weigh them.

The sociological aspects of France's educational ideals are not original with him. He simply interested himself in movements already under way. However, they constitute perhaps the most significant part of his educational thought. All his other ideas and ideals were well explained on the basis of his own education and his reading throughout his life. That a man who had been brought up as he had and who had spent his life in narrow intellectual circles could have interested himself so enthusiastically in the condition of the working classes is significant. It

shows that there was a real problem which needed solution. And it shows the true character of the man France. It is the most powerful argument against accusations that he was a cynic. It is a proof that he was not in all aspects of his thought a sceptic. The evolution toward the sociological point of view in his ideas on education coincides with the evolution of his thinking along general social and political lines, and a study of this development helps to explain his life and works as a whole.

Although his ideas lack originality, he makes an intelligent selection of the ideas of others. He has gone far in the modern trend, farther than most of his contemporaries. But he has retained some of the best of the old to serve as a balance wheel for the new and partially untried. This is something which a professional educator would not be likely to do. The professional educator tends to align himself with one school or movement and, by so doing, closes his eyes to what may be good features in other movements. The intelligent layman, such as Anatole France, who studies the problem, can see across the boundary lines between different schools of thought and select what appears to be of value in any of them. This is just what he did.

It is interesting to observe to how great an extent education, since the time of his death, has tended to progress along the lines he suggested. Even his most old-fashioned ideal, the background of training in the humanities, is again being advocated with slight modifications. We have made great progress in the democratization of education along the lines he suggested. We still have far to go in order to attain his ideal, but the movement is toward rather than away from it. We are attempting to increase opportunities for the appreciation of the arts, from the elementary schools up. The conclusion must be that his educational ideas were well thought out and that his ideal is one worth striving for.

## VITA

Eunice Carmichael Roberts was born Eunice Carmichael October 14, 1902, in Jonesboro, Alabama. With the exception of four years in the public schools of Bloomington, Indiana (third grade to eighth grade), her elementary and secondary education was by private instruction, principally under the guidance of her father. She was admitted to the University of Illinois by entrance examination, matriculating in September, 1919. She received her A.B. degree with honorable mention from that institution in 1923 and her A.M. in 1924. Her major study has been the Romance Languages, especially French and Spanish; her minor, English.

She was instructor of French and Spanish at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, during the school year 1924-1925. She was assistant in the Romance Language Department of the University of Illinois (an emergency appointment) for the fall term of 1925-1926.

In February, 1938, shortly following the death of her husband, she reentered the University of Illinois to begin work toward the doctorate.

She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Pi Delta Phi (national French honorary), and Sigma Delta Pi (national Spanish honorary).